Recognizing that senior bureaucrats require political craft, many liberal democracies do now tend to staff important ministries with politically loyal and sympathetic civil servants. This practice, long familiar in Germany and Finland, has spread to other Western democracies (Peters and Pierre, 2004). Increasingly, politicians want civil servants who are, in Mrs Thatcher’s famous phrase, ‘one of us’.

Second, ministerial direction can also be aided by providing ministers with personal advisory staff. Because such advisers do not form part of the department’s permanent staff, they can act as their minister’s eyes and ears, reporting back on issues which might otherwise be lost in the official hierarchy. In New Zealand, every minister’s office featured a political adviser by 2006 (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2007). Alternatively, as in France, ministers are aided by a cabinet. This is a group of about 15 to 20 people who form the ministers’ personal advisory staff and work directly under their control (a cabinet in this sense of a ministerial advisory group is unconnected with the cabinet which stands at the pinnacle of parliamentary government).

**Divisions**

Departments are typically arranged into divisions or sections, each responsible for an aspect of the organization’s work. Thus, an Education Department might include separate divisions for primary, secondary, and higher education. Divisions are the operating units of departments, the sections within which the work gets done. They are the workhorses of government, the store of its experience and, in practice, the site where many important decisions are reached. Divisions are the state’s engine room.

In some democracies, divisions acquire added importance because they are partially autonomous from their parent department. The extreme case is the USA, whose bureaucracy is the great exception to Weber’s principle of hierarchy in departments. Even in their formal structure, American departments are more like multinational corporations, containing many divisions (often called ‘agencies’ in the USA) jostling within a single shell. The departments are merely the wrapping around a collection of disparate divisions and it is these bureaus which form the main operating units of the federal government. For example, the Department of Health and

**Figure 17.1 Founding of federal departments in Canada and the USA**

As this comparison of Canada and United States illustrates, countries follow a broadly similar sequence in introducing departments.